

Kurt Weill

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Newsletter



„Die Bürgschaft“
Die Bürgschaft

Then and Now

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Cover photo: Costume sketch by Caspar Neher for *Die Bürgschaft*. Depicted are Johann Mattes, his wife Anna, and their daughter Luise.

Letters

To the Editor:

Daniel Albright's review of Teresa Stratas's recording of *Die sieben Todsünden* fails to disclose a critical fact about this release: it is a "live recording of video sessions for the film by Peter Sellars," to quote the fine print on the back of the CD cover. Certainly Erato shares considerable blame for the oversight, because apart from this disclaimer there's no other reference to Sellars's video-film on the cover or anywhere in the accompanying program booklet. This is mysterious (at best), since Sellars has many admirers, and the record company would presumably want to advertise his involvement in the production.

Still, the disc does sound like a video soundtrack. There's audible evidence that something unusual is going on: Mr. Albright's suspicions were rightly alerted. But Stratas's performance requires less "indulgence" when one realizes that she has recorded an already demanding role while simultaneously acting, dancing, jumping up and down, and seeking to avoid the unflattering attentions of Sellars's errant camera.

Under the circumstances, does her tone occasionally waver? Sure. But it's false to suggest that Stratas sounds like another stevedore impersonating Lenya; this is a powerful musical interpretation, and much of the singing is as good as anything Stratas has ever done.

Stratas spent years creating her Anna; in 1989–90, I was privy to some of the preparations for her own production—later canceled—intended for the Brooklyn Academy of Music. At that time, Stratas explored the mythology of stardom and the American Dream, and the concept of "home" in an America where homelessness has deeply troubled her. Despite Sellars's notorious lack of interest in the ideas of other artists, from Bach to Mozart to Weill, many of Stratas's ideas did find their way into the film.

To act and sing and dance Anna has always been fundamental to Stratas's interpretation. That doesn't encourage pristine sound recording, but sound isn't all she's after. Here, as always, Stratas seeks to embrace everything at once: sound and image and movement, joy and suffering and terror, the light and the dark and all the gray matter between—especially the gray matter between our ears. She does not, cannot, always capture all she strives for, but even her misses are more interesting (and "definitive") than other people's successes.

William V. Madison
New York City

In Memoriam

Randolph Symonette, 1910–98

Randolph Symonette, the baritone who created the role of the Hangman in *Firebrand of Florence* (Weill-Gershwin-Mayer, 1945), died on 1 January 1998. He was also a longtime friend of both Weill and Lenya and the husband of Lys Symonette, a vice-president of the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music. He was 88 years old.



Symonette made his New York City Opera debut in 1952 as the Commendatore; ten years later he premiered as Telramund at the Metropolitan Opera, where he also sang Amonasro, Wotan, and the Wanderer that season. On Broadway, he appeared in *Street Scene* (Weill), *The Consul* (Menotti), and *Let's Make an Opera* (Britten). Symonette was for many years the leading *Heldenbariton* at the Deutsche

Oper am Rhein (Düsseldorf) and sang in Europe's leading opera houses. He retired from the stage in 1972 to accept a position at Florida State University in Tallahassee, where he served on the faculty until 1983.

Todd Duncan, 1903–98



Todd Duncan, who created the role of Stephen Kumalo in *Lost in the Stars* (Weill-Anderson, 1949), died on 28 February 1998 at the age of 95. Perhaps most famous for his portrayal of Porgy in the 1935 premiere of *Porgy and Bess*, Duncan's debut as Tonio at the New York City Opera in 1945 made him the first black singer to perform opera with a white cast. After his 25-year career in opera and recital singing, Duncan shared his art and craft with hundreds of students at Howard University and the Curtis Institute of Music. About the song "Lost in the Stars," Duncan commented, "It's universal, and that's the part I

loved about it. And yet, it takes care of the little man, of this one star that had fallen through God's hand. And it's about the oppressed, those who experience prejudice because of color, religion, or whatever. And we've had that, it seems, ever since there has been human nature."

„Die Bürgschaft“

Die Bürgschaft

Then and Now

Die Bürgschaft is the first major product of a new style, which began with *Der Lindberghflug* and above all *Der Jasager*.

—Kurt Weill, November 1931

Reading the libretto can at most serve to establish whether there are any political or other type of concerns. An appraisal of the artistic value is only possible with a study of the score. —Kurt Weill, August 1931

The current revival of *Die Bürgschaft* in Bielefeld, Germany marks the opera's first staged production since Carl Ebert revived it in 1957 at the Städtische Oper, Berlin. Again, as in 1957 and during the premiere in 1932, Weill and Neher's libretto raises questions about the authors' political and social intentions.

From the beginning, Weill knew that *Die Bürgschaft* would stir controversy in Germany's charged political and social climate of 1931–32. Not only would the opera-going public presumably be hearing his new musical style for the first time, the libretto presented such a disturbingly negative view of society that *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Mahagonny* paled in comparison.

Die Bürgschaft remains an intriguing mystery to most followers of Weill's music; there are no commercial recordings, the published libretto is not readily available, nor has it been translated into English. For this reason, we present here a few sources useful for readers to gain an initial understanding of the opera and its underlying messages.

Jonathan Eaton, director of the current production in Bielefeld, presents his view of the opera as a twentieth-century passion play. We then jump back in time to review the parable that Weill and Neher used for inspiration. A fairly detailed plot synopsis is followed by an excerpt from Felix Jackson's unpublished biography of Weill. Stephen Hinton places in context his translation of Herbert Trantow's public challenge to Weill and the composer's response, both examples of the journalistic debate that ensued following the premiere. The section closes with Horst Kogler's review of the current production in Bielefeld.

Die Bürgschaft in 1998 A Passion Play for the Twentieth Century

by Jonathan Eaton

A pledge, or bond, in the sense of the title of Weill and Neher's opera, presents an interesting combination of relationships. It starts with the premise that something has gone awry and offers a system to put it right. In this case, Mattes has gambled away everything he owns and cannot pay his debts. The creditors are hot on his heels, his wife and child are likely to be thrown out onto the streets. A disaster is in the making. Fortunately, however, Mattes is able to persuade his neighbor Orth to vouch for him and assume eventual responsibility for his gambling debts. In return for this pledge the creditors are prepared to delay demanding payment for a reasonable period, thus allowing Mattes time to raise the necessary funds elsewhere. Orth has to trust that Mattes will find the money, but is bound to pay the debt if Mattes does not. This combination of trust, reasonableness, and reliability functions well and averts a disaster. Thus the prologue to *Die Bürgschaft* shows how a bad decision or act can be redressed and its disastrous consequences averted when all parties agree to act with the generosity, responsibility, and trustworthiness implicit in the notion of such a pledge. Man, money, the law, and society can function, despite their imperfections, in a harmonious relationship. It is no surprise that at this point in the opera a rainbow appears—the biblical symbol of God's pledge to Noah to spare the world. The rest of the opera, however, shows us what happens when any element of this pledge-relationship is ignored. The consequences are apocalyptic.

In the first act, both Mattes and Orth behave unreliably—if not downright dishonestly—and deceive themselves as to their true motives. Orth hides his money in a sack of chaff, then lies to Mattes and says he has no more chaff to sell. When Mattes points out that this is not the case, Orth finds himself in the awkward position of having to agree to sell the sack to Mattes and, in his embarrassment at being caught in a lie, fails to admit that he has money hidden inside it. Afterwards he can only trust and hope that Mattes will return the money when he finds it. Mattes finds the money, but cannot initially bring himself to acknowledge that it does not belong to him. It is these small, unworthy transgressions of the individual—of not wanting to admit—of looking the other way—of failing to confront—of avoiding responsibility—of falling short of the spirit of a “pledge”—that start a process of degradation which ultimately spreads to include a whole society and leads inexorably to catastrophe.

Die Bürgschaft...Then and Now

Throughout the opera, a small chorus comments on the events that transpire. It does not content itself with staying on the sidelines however, and after a while it becomes clear that the commentary offered is not necessarily neutral. In the scene that follows Mattes's discovery of Orth's money in the sack of chaff, both men meet in their fishing boats in the middle of the river. Neither will confront the issue of the money openly. A mist arises and prevents them from seeing each other and talking easily. What is the cause of their failure to communicate? Is it the mist, or their own intransigence? The chorus appears to lay the blame on the mist; the men go so far as to give us a lengthy and complex meteorological explanation as to how mist arises over a river on a cool evening after a hot day. The explanation is correct, but it is irrelevant to the central moral struggle, to what is really going on. The chorus seems content with external explanations. Here, then, it is not so much what is said as what is not said that is of central importance to the scene. The chorus seems to share with Mattes and Orth an unwillingness to probe crucial moral decisions.

What did Weill and Neher want their audience to understand? After all, the opera is, in style, an "epic" opera, to apply the term that Brecht and Weill devised to describe their collaborations on pieces such as *Der Jasager* and *Mahagonny*. "Epic" theater was intended to stimulate understanding, to encourage audiences to forego emotional identification in favor of critical consideration of social and moral issues. Should we be tempted to accept the opinions voiced by the small chorus as those of the authors? The small chorus repeats in a chorale what appears to be a creed: "Man does not change. External conditions change his attitudes. He comes and goes and remains what he is; he does the same at the end as he does at the beginning." At the end of the opera, Orth, who will no longer pledge his help to Mattes and betrays him to the mob, joins the credo, affirming that "everything obeys one law: the law of money, the law of power." Do Weill and Neher want us to understand that external events and laws of economic history are the cause of all that goes wrong, that man is not responsible because he is immutable and impotent? Far from it. One voice, at least, fights

the orthodoxy represented by the body of the chorus: an alto soloist, drawn from its number, who laments the way things turn from bad to worse appears to resist that flow. In the scene where mist gives Orth and Mattes an excuse to avoid dealing directly with each other, she sings: "Impenetrable, like the mist, are the words they speak." The same might well be applied to the pronouncements of the small chorus. By drawing our attention to the inadequacy of what is said, however, we are encouraged to look behind the surface statements to what has not been said.

Die Bürgschaft was written in 1931-32 by a celebrated composer—a Jew who hobnobbed with communists—at a time when the Weimar Republic was crumbling. The following year Hitler was elected. There were then (as now) five million unemployed in Germany. Weill was forced to flee the country. The history of Germany in the years after 1932 demonstrates clearly the horrendous consequences of choosing not to see, of the individual denying his conscience, of avoiding confrontation, of toeing the party line, of abdicating moral responsibility. At the end of the opera, Orth might better have ascribed the collapse of civilization to the lack of the sorts of value-relationships between people, money, the law, and society that made the pledge possible in the prologue. Instead, we watch him ally himself with the creed of the small chorus and wash his hands of the responsibility for the murder of Mattes.

Weill and Neher do not directly tell the audience or their central characters what they should or should not have done. In this "epic" opera, which musically and dramatically has so many close connections to an oratorio, Weill and Neher wrote not so much a "Lehrstück" or didactic piece, but a "Warnstück," or a work of warning. *Die Bürgschaft* is a passion play for the twentieth century, as relevant now as it was sixty years ago. We ignore its implications at our peril.

The author is the stage director of the current production of *Die Bürgschaft* at the Bühnen der Stadt Bielefeld, Germany.



Scene from the 1957 revival of *Die Bürgschaft* in Berlin. Photo: Ilse Buhs.

Parable

“Der afrikanische Rechtsspruch”

by Johann Gottfried von Herder

On 27 August 1930, almost six months after demonstrators had interrupted the premiere of *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* and two months after the unqualified success of *Der Jasager*, Weill wrote to his publisher:

I have been working with Caspar Neher on an opera libretto for about two weeks. The results of this work so far are surprisingly good. We have constructed a very strong and simple plot and have now written the prologue. I think it quite possible that this collaboration can produce the libretto I need now. The title of this full-length opera will probably be: Die Bürgschaft.

Weill did not mention that the plot outline was inspired by a parable by Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) titled “Der afrikanische Rechtsspruch” [The African Judgement], which was based on a teaching from the “Baba Metzia” section of the Talmud. Herder is acknowledged, however, in the program of the original production, and the parable is reprinted as a preface to the published libretto (Universal Edition Nr. 1527) with the heading: “The middle part of this opera makes use of the following parable by Herder.”

For a full discussion of Weill and Neher’s interpretation of the parable, see David Drew’s “The *Bürgschaft* Debate and the Timeliness of the Untimely” in *A Stranger Here Myself: Kurt Weill-Studien* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1993). The following translation of the parable is taken from this article.

Alexander of Macedon once arrived in a remote and wealthy African province. The inhabitants brought him bowls of perfect golden fruit. “Eat this fruit at home,” said Alexander; “I have not come to see your riches, but to learn of your customs.” Then they led him to the marketplace, where their king was sitting in judgment. At that moment a citizen stepped forward and spoke: “O King, I have bought from this man a sack of grain and have found in it an unexpected treasure. The grain is mine but not the gold; and this man will not take it back. Speak to him, O King, for it is his.” And his opponent, who was also a citizen of that place, answered: “You are afraid of keeping something not your own: should I not be afraid to accept such a thing from you? I sold you the sack, including everything that was in it. Take what is yours. Speak to him, O King!”

The King asked the first man if he had a son. “Yes,” he answered. The King then asked the other if he had a daughter, and again the answer was yes. “Good,” said the King, “you are both righteous people; join your children in marriage, and give them the treasure as dowry—that is my decision.”

Alexander was astonished at this verdict. “Are you astonished because I have pronounced unjustly?” asked the King. “By no means,” answered Alexander, “but in our country the verdict would be different.” “In what way?” asked the African King. “Both parties would lose their heads,” Alexander replied, “and the gold would go to the King.”

The King clasped his hands, and said: “Does the sun shine in your land too, and does the rain still fall from the heavens?” “Yes,” replied Alexander. “Then,” said the King, “that must be because of the innocent animals who live in your land; for on such a people no sun can shine and no rain can fall.”

Synopsis

In the mythical land of Urb, a cattle dealer, Johann Mattes (high baritone), having lost all his money through gambling, is being pursued by creditors. His wife Anna (mezzo-soprano) persuades him to seek help from a grain dealer, David Orth (bass), who lives across the lake. “He [her husband] has always been like that since I’ve known him,” she muses, “and will never change.” The chorus intones a chorale-like passage, reiterated throughout the opera: “It’s not man that changes; it’s social relations that change his attitude.” Orth is prepared to make a pledge on behalf of his “best customer.” The creditors, about to dispossess Mattes, accept. The chorus concludes the narration: Mattes repays his debts.

Six years later, Mattes buys two sacks of grain from Orth. Orth’s son Jakob (tenor) subsequently points out that the sacks were in fact a hiding-place for his father’s savings. Orth is sanguine: Mattes will return the money. Mattes is mugged by three Highwaymen on his way home, but they take only his purse. Mattes decides that Orth does not know about the contents of the sacks either. Three Blackmailers (baritones) discover the secret and threaten to reveal it to Orth. Mattes races them across the lake and confesses to Orth, whose reaction is surprising. Although he considers Mattes’s confession “too late,” he also questions his own right to the money: the judge in the city shall decide.

The Judge (tenor) decrees that the money belongs neither to Mattes nor to Orth: it shall be set aside for the former’s daughter and the latter’s son when they are older. An announcement is made that the Great Power, which has seized control of Urb, is to send its Commissar (tenor). Henceforth a new law is to prevail, the law of money and power. The Commissar, eager to assert his authority as a “warning and a sign of discipline,” forces the Blackmailers, under threat of execution, into assisting him, then retrieves Mattes and Orth. Declaring both parties criminals, he will release them only if they, like all civil servants, actively support the regime. Meanwhile Anna bemoans the temporary loss of her husband and of her daughter Luise (soprano), who has left for the big city.

A further six years elapse. As the chorus reports, times have changed; man has not. Under the new rule, the rich have become richer, the poor poorer. As if in a pageant, the inhabitants of Urb have to pass through four gates: War, Inflation, Hunger, and Disease. But thanks to the war, Mattes and Orth have come into money. Although Anna wishes to leave, Mattes, seized by greed, wishes to stay. The aftermath of the war brings inflation, followed by hunger. Mattes and Orth exploit these for their own gain, but Anna falls victim to disease. As she is dying, Luise can be seen in a dance hall in the city, pursued by suitors. The people of Urb rise up in anger against Mattes who, contrary to his expectation, fails to receive support from the Commissar, or from Orth, who is no longer willing to help his friend. Instead they fight, and Orth leaves Mattes, blinded by blood, to be finished off by the crowd. Orth reiterates the maxim: “Everything happens according to a law, the law of money, the law of power.”

By Stephen Hinton. Reprinted from “Die Bürgschaft,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1992): v. 1:645.

Die Bürgschaft...Then and Now

Excerpt from

Portrait of a Quiet Man

by Felix Jackson

As early as the spring of 1931, Kurt Weill realized that his next work for the theater would not be with Brecht. The years with Brecht and the enormous success of *Die Dreigroschenoper* had established Kurt Weill as a member of a two-man team, not only with professionals and critics, but also with the theater audience. Few insiders had known about the friction between the two men. The complete break, highly publicized, came as a surprise.

Brecht's exciting and provocative personality had made him appear the stronger of the two. His friends predicted with a smirk of sorrow that "poor Weill" would fall flat on his face without the Master. Weill was conscious of this, but it didn't worry him. He was much too sure of himself, of his own professional individuality. He didn't regret the break. He felt a sense of relief.

Caspar Neher knew that Weill was looking for a libretto, and he proposed a parable by Johann Gottfried von Herder. Neher thought that the story could be developed into a full-length opera dealing with contemporary problems and attitudes. Kurt Weill agreed. By the summer of 1931 the work was almost finished. It was titled *Die Bürgschaft* (*The Pledge*). Weill and Neher had expanded Herder's fable into a sociological panorama. The theme: "Man never changes. Due to circumstances his behavior changes."

It was a thesis easily applicable to the situation in Germany where due to circumstances (rise of the cost of living, unemployment, foreign pressure) more and more people were changing into Nazis. Weill and Neher saw in *Die Bürgschaft* another possibility to dramatize contemporary conditions in Germany.

Undoubtedly, a Brechtian concept. A didactic play. But—without Brecht. Caspar Neher was a poet with his brush and pencil. Words were not his tools. He didn't possess Brecht's imagery and power of language. The dramatic impulse in *Die Bürgschaft* springs from the circumstances, not from the characters. The people are pawns of their environment and motivated solely by outside events. Neher's libretto has the simplistic style of a didactic play but its scope demands the full apparatus of grand opera.

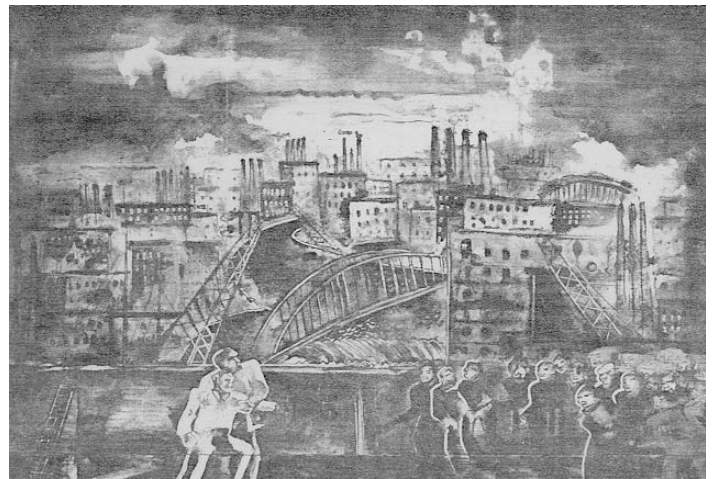
Kurt Weill superimposed the musical style of *Der Jasager* on the stately facade of baroque opera, producing self-contained numbers of an oratorio-like formality which made it possible to put the emphasis where it belonged—on the events, not on the people—without jeopardizing the dramatic unity. He added to the ceremonious manner of a George Frederick Handel his very own contemporary element of jazz.

The preparations for the opening scheduled for March 1932 were protracted and wearisome. The eminent, Vienna-born conductor Fritz Stiedry, then in his late forties, who had followed Bruno Walter as the musical director of Berlin's Municipal Opera House, headed the orchestra. The sessions with Weill, Neher, and Stiedry in Carl Ebert's office lasted frequently until the early morning hours. On some occasions the impatient Stiedry, who wasn't too fond of Kurt Weill's piano playing, urged him off the

piano bench and sat down at the piano himself, snarling, "You mess up everything!"

The second act was a big problem. "We had a hell of a time trying to make it all jell," Carl Ebert remembered. "But it was also a very happy time. We were sharing in something we believed in."

The opening performance of *Die Bürgschaft*, on 10 March 1932 under Carl Ebert's masterful direction, was, in the words of the prominent music critic Alfred Einstein, "an achievement of the highest order." The press reaction was divided. The score fared far better than the libretto. But passions were aroused. Some disagreed sharply with the way Kurt Weill had incorporated modern jazz elements into the classic baroque form. Others considered *Die Bürgschaft* a most important step toward a new operatic concept. One or two traditionalists hailed Weill's return to grand opera and hoped that the "refugee" from *Die Dreigroschenoper* would continue to write "serious music" from now on. The rightist papers condemned the work (as usual) as communist-Jewish propaganda.



Scene sketch from the program for the Düsseldorf production of *Die Bürgschaft*, 1932.

To Kurt Weill, *Die Bürgschaft* represented one more stage in his quest for new operatic forms. He ridiculed the suggestion that its score was more "serious" than the music of *Die Dreigroschenoper* or *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*. The score was different because the subject was different.

Still, I felt that *Die Bürgschaft* had its shortcomings and, some weeks after the opening, I tried to tell him what I thought was wrong with it. He put his pipe aside and listened to me intently. His eyes were fixed on me and he didn't interrupt me once. Encouraged by his obvious interest in my opinion, I went into great detail. I thought that I was at my persuasive best, and that I sounded very convincing. Kurt's expression didn't change. When I finally stopped, he said calmly, "Maybe you're right. So what? We did exactly what we set out to do. We didn't think it was perfect. But it's damn good."

Felix Jackson (1902-92), the librettist for Weill's *Na und?*, was a close friend of Weill in Germany. This article is taken from his unpublished account of Weill's German career, *Portrait of a Quiet Man: Kurt Weill, His Life and His Times* (chapter 24, pp. 186-93). A copy of the typescript is in the Weill-Lenya Research Center.

Die Bürgschaft...Then and Now

Kurt Weill: Concerning *Die Bürgschaft*

Introduced and translated by Stephen Hinton

Weill rarely responded publicly to comments appearing in print about him or his music. One of those rare occasions was his short letter to *Life* magazine about his having been described as a “German composer,” which in 1947 he no longer considered himself to be; another was his long letter, translated below, written in response to a critical article concerning his opera *Die Bürgschaft* by the conductor and pianist Herbert Trantow. To appreciate the significance of the letter, one needs not only to consider that such responses were rare, but also to read first the article that prompted his published reaction, also translated below. In a sense the description of Weill as a German composer, even during his American years, was correct, just as the article about *Die Bürgschaft* airs some criticisms that Weill seems to suggest were valid as an “opinion.” The problem is that the article’s author did indeed fail to grasp “the basis and self-evident assumptions” of Weill’s work. Trantow, who later worked as a film composer in East Germany, subscribes to a variant of “socialist realism,” expecting a vision of a better society rather than a “blatant and unvarnished” portrayal of things as they are. Weill and Neher’s realism, on the other hand, is of the kind known as “critical realism,” focusing on the bleaker, negative aspects of society as they knew it and leaving the audience to draw its own conclusions. A fuller context for Weill’s and Trantow’s differences, with discussion of other opinions, is provided by David Drew’s searching essay “The *Bürgschaft* Debate and the Timeliness of the Untimely,” in *A Stranger Here Myself: Kurt Weill Studien*.

*Herbert Trantow: Questions for Kurt Weill concerning his Bürgschaft*¹

Does Kurt Weill know how expectantly his new opera has been awaited by all those who are well disposed to the new, insofar as the new is positive and creative?

If so, having taught in *Der Jasager* that life is worth nothing as compared with responsibility to the community, did he write *Die Bürgschaft* in the same negative and destructive manner?

Why the line: “Human beings do not change; it is social relations that change their attitude?”

Why not: “Human beings change decisively on the basis of gradual development through intellectual insights and spiritual experience; whoever changes his attitude because of external conditions does not deserve, with such elastic beliefs, to be called a human being?”

Do “social relations” exist in the Weill-Neher sense? Would Weill-Neher allow themselves to be changed at a critical moment by such “relations?” Wouldn’t they assert themselves in spite of such “relations?”

If so, why the proclamation of this dogma by all three acts of *Die Bürgschaft*? Does one want to provide the audience with a com-

Mankind does not change, only circumstances change. As does the system which creates these circumstances until the day it must die because of its own transition.

All things are governed by one rule only. The rule of power. The rule of money.

To give nothing and to keep everything. That is the road to prosperity.

As times are changing we are changing with them. We hoist our flags according to the wind, spineless, without backbone.

Excerpts from the libretto.

fortable excuse for its spiritual corruption (“It’s not your fault; social relations have made you bad”) or does one want to teach them by example not to resist the “Great Power” because human beings are victims of “social relations” (50 years ago: products of the “milieu”).

Since, after all, *Die Bürgschaft* presents itself as a didactic opera [*Opernlehrstück*], why isn’t it used to demonstrate that there are people who preserve their humanity by resisting the temptations of capitalism? Why is it tragic or instructive that Mattes is killed at the end as punishment for his unsocial behavior? Orth, after all, remains alive, having become just as much of a shady dealer under the influence of the “Great Power,” and having shamelessly betrayed his friend to the mob, although he once made a pledge to him.

How are war, inflation, hunger, and sickness exclusively the result of capitalism? Assuming they are: why aren’t we shown how this bad capitalist system is overcome? On the contrary, Weill-Neher teach us that capitalism remains the victor and that outwardly one can do just fine under this system if one becomes involved in “shady dealing” (the case of Orth); that one is only badly off if one resists (the case of the wise judge). Why aren’t we given the victory of idealism and enduring human rights and honor over the “Great Power?”

Will Weill create his next *Lehrstück* around a theme that shows how human beings are happier under a better system, so that listeners can go home wanting to contribute to the construction of this new, better, and pedagogically presented world? Shouldn’t he also be aware that there are more people than he thinks who don’t attach the slightest value to money and outward well-being—the kind of value, according to Weill, that determines human values, as he has been telling us since *Die Dreigroschenoper* (with the exception of *Der Jasager*)?

Couldn’t he write a *Lehrstück* in which he demonstrates that money fails miserably as compared with spiritual power, and that it is more necessary to ponder pure humanity in our time than to struggle against a superficially superior power? Doesn’t the history of all spiritual activity prove that in the long run outward power comes up short?

¹Original publication: Herbert Trantow, “Fragen an Kurt Weill, seine *Bürgschaft* betreffend,” *Melos* 11 (August–September 1932): 276–77. This article and Weill’s answer are reprinted in Kurt Weill, *Musik und Theater: Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Stephen Hinton and Jürgen Schebera (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1990), pp. 105–108.

²Original publication: Kurt Weill, “Kurt Weill antwortet,” *Melos* 11 (October 1932): 336–37.

Die Bürgschaft...Then and Now**Kurt Weill: [Concerning Die Bürgschaft]²**

Dear Professor Mersmann,

In the latest issue of *Melos* you published a series of questions directed at me concerning *Die Bürgschaft*. I have attempted to answer these questions. However, that is hardly possible because these questions represent only another form of subjective criticism. Whenever the basis and self-evident assumptions of a work of art are either doubted or disputed, then it is one opinion against another.

I maintain that our line about social relations changing human behavior is right and that Trantow's is wrong; we did not want to show heroes or supermen but rather human types whose "intellectual insights and spiritual experiences" are less important than how they behave. Of course there are "social relations" in our sense that determine our behavior. Perhaps it will help the questioner if he can conceive of the "economic relations" we are talking about as a concretization of what the Ancients called "fate."

I maintain that the conclusion of *Die Bürgschaft* is both tragic and "instructive." Yet the tragedy lies less in the death of Mattes than in the explanation given by Orth in his closing words; and in the wretchedness of this perception rests the "moral" that members of the audience can take home with them.

This brings us to the "main point of the prosecution": the accusation of negativity. The questioner forgets that socially representative art of all ages was at pains, often excessively so, to show things as they are, and only through the manner of representation to suggest to the audience a critique of what was being presented. Such art limits itself to leaving the audience with the sense that existing conditions must be changed, and it seeks to achieve this by revealing the conditions in their most blatant, unvarnished form. This was the approach taken by *Die Bürgschaft*, especially because it was intended all along to be a tragic opera. It would have been nice, of course, against the same ideological background to come up with something positive and affirmative, and I would be the first to seize such an opportunity with both hands were it to present itself. I consider looking for such an opportunity in the realm of the "purely human," however, to be particularly dangerous in opera because I believe that the task of opera today is to move beyond the fate of private individuals toward universality.

In conclusion, a point that I consider important: *Die Bürgschaft* is not a didactic play [*Lehrstück*] but an opera. It is written for the theater. It does not want to demonstrate dogmas but rather, in accord with the tasks of the theater, to present human activity against the background of a universal idea.

One more thing: in an age in which some engage in artistic frivolities while others prefer to be entirely unproductive in order to avoid rubbing anybody the wrong way, *Die Bürgschaft* undertakes an attempt to adopt a position on matters that concern us all. Such an attempt must elicit discussions as a matter of course. That is part of its job. Yet for a discussion to occur it is necessary that the opposite point of view is precisely and carefully analyzed. The questions that you publish are very well suited to add yet further misconceptions to the ones that already exist.

With best wishes,
Kurt Weill

Photos from the original production of
Die Bürgschaft, Städtische Oper, Berlin, 10 March 1932.



From left: Rudolf Gonszar, Wilhelm Gombert, and Eduard Kandl in costume. Photo: Studio Suse Byk.



Hans Reinmar as Johann Mattes.



A scene in Orth's granary.

Die Bürgschaft...Then and Now

Performance Review

Die Bürgschaft

Bielefeld, Germany

Bühnen der Stadt Bielefeld

Premiere: 26 April 1998

In repertory until 23 June 1998

Two generations after its first performance in 1932 at Berlin's Städtische Oper (later renamed Deutsche Oper Berlin), Weill's *Die Bürgschaft* scored a unanimous success when it opened at the Bühnen der Stadt Bielefeld on 26 April 1998. No wonder the Nazis immediately banned it when they seized power in 1933. It prophetically announced a "new order," demonstrating the dire consequences suffered when the twin laws of Money and Power and an insatiable imperialism subjugate a country through war, hunger, inflation and disease. This must have been very disturbing to those in power. The heavily cut and softened 1957 revival at the West Berlin Städtische Oper did not meet with much sympathy either, at a time when West Germany was still suffering from the devastating consequences of the Second World War. The opera's distinctly Marxist attacks on the evils of capitalism were not welcomed by the opera-going public in the divided and foreign-occupied city.

The fact that another forty years elapsed before *Die Bürgschaft* appeared again highlights the still reluctant German reception of Weill off the beaten *Dreigroschenoper*-and-*Mahagonny* track. It is doubtful whether the Bielefeld initiative will change this attitude. However, those present at the premiere of the current revival agreed that *Bürgschaft* is not merely Weill's lengthiest work, but it is among the composer's most substantial, multi-layered pieces.

Caspar Neher's text remains somewhat hard to digest for present-day audiences. Heavily influenced by the stark simplicity of Brecht (in particular *Der Jasager* and *Der Lindberghflug*), it lacks Brecht's unique, visionary sense of poetry. A case in point is the coinage of the opera's rosary-like motto: "Es ändert sich nicht der Mensch.

Es sind die Verhältnisse, die seine Haltung verändern." ("It's not man that changes, it's social relations that change his attitude.") If the concentrated centenary retrospective of Brecht in recent months has sharpened our ears to the crude, sledgehammer *agit-prop* prose of Neher's libretto, so has the recent revival of music theater pieces from the Weimar Republic (from Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* to Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage*—most of them tried out under John Dew's directorship at Bielefeld) enhanced our appreciation of *Die Bürgschaft* as an enormous musical achievement.



Mattes (William Oberholtzer), Orth (Martin Blasius), and Jakob Orth (Lassi Partanen) in a scene from Act I.

Photo: Fritz Stockmeier

The monumental choruses, which set the score distinctly between Bach passions and Handel oratorios on the one hand, and Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* on the other (not to mention Orff's later watered-down attempts with *Carmina Burana*), bestow on the music of *Die Bürgschaft* its indigenous weight and tragic pathos. They were widely commented upon by critics in 1932, and, vivid and stark in their naked yet refined precision, they continue to engage audiences now. The Bielefeld chorus, although carefully prepared by Mathias Köhler and Jacob Franck, was visibly (and audibly) too small to do full justice to Weill's monumental choral passages, some of which are sup-

posed to be thundering walls of sound. (Further, the chorus was placed too far backstage during the first part of the performance, compromising the audibility of the text.) Critics in 1932 also registered with astonishment *Die Bürgschaft's* musical indebtedness to the late Verdi, not only in its melodic thrust, but also in its greatly expanded structural units. Ernst Bloch even wrote that this opera "has a piece of Jewish-Verdi in it." The Bielefeld performance also illustrated a close link between *Die Bürgschaft* and a later Weill work, *Street Scene*. The stirring scenes with Anna, the wife of Mattes—especially her heartrending death scene—are akin to Anna Murrant's most tragic moments. Weill's 1932 score is the more touching, however, because of its spare and condensed instru-

mentation, particularly the cool and chaste colorations in the woodwinds.

Weill also proves amply that he has lost nothing of his bitter-sweet, whisky-sour song style (associated with his collaborations with Brecht) with the Gang of Three in their cabaret-like intermezzo appearances: first as Creditors, then, in succession (genuine opportunists as they are), as Highwaymen, Blackmailers, Pursuers, and State Informers. Browsing through the vocal score, one notices time and again the almost spartan austerity of Weill's writing, its theatrical efficiency, and its dynamic pulse. There is so much "air" in this marvelous score.

Die Bürgschaft...Then and Now

The "Gang of Three" (Andrew Dalley, Mathias Mann, and Luca Martin) in Act II. Photo: Fritz Stockmeier

Bielefeld's Generalmusikdirektor Rainer Koch is by now highly experienced in conducting demanding musical scores composed in the twenties and early thirties. Although the Bielefeld performance exemplified a model of ensemble performance and of conscientious preparation, I could nonetheless imagine a more energetic and aggressive leader at the helm of the local

orchestra. I especially missed the sharp attack and great expansion in *Die Bürgschaft's* thunderous, avalanching finale.

What the Bielefeld production amply demonstrated, however, was Weill's claim that "*Die Bürgschaft* is not a didactic play, but an opera." Director Jonathan Eaton delivered a truly operatic production and set designer Thomas Huber created a plain and simple set on stage: a cube with lamellar walls and shuttered neon lights as the only decor apart from simple chairs, tables and a few necessary props. The costumes by Martin Warth clearly traced the "progress" from agrarian culture to urban society, including a gradual decline into uniform garb. The production had a stark, woodcut quality but was not without its sensitive touches, especially the almost shy and chaste gestures that showed the deterioration of the original friendship between Mattes and Orth into egomaniac isolation and, finally, into the abandonment of all human ties. To relieve the gloom, Eaton, with the help of choreographer Maria Haus, staged the appearances of the Gang of Three as brilliant displays in the style of



Johann Mattes (William Oberholtzer) with his wife Anna (Margaret Thompson). Photo: Fritz Stockmeier

cabaret sketches, as if they had been devised by a collaboration between George Grosz and Bob Fosse. (The fabulous Luca Martin-Andrew Dalley-Mathias Mann trio should team up as the Bielefeld Comedians for some lucrative engagements after the production ends.) Once Eaton lets the chorus participate actively in the stage proceedings (i.e., abandoning its initial role as objective narrator and commentator far backstage), he shows their moral degradation in a frightening crescendo of brutality and barbarity.

Headed by Martin Blasius as Orth, the cast impresses through its vocal prowess and professionalism, proving to us that true ensemble performances can still be found in the German provinces. Blasius possesses an unusually rich and powerful bass-baritone, which he handles with great refinement and easy flow. As an actor, he impresses through his massive radiance and warmhearted authority. William Oberholtzer, slimmer of build and gifted with an elegant *Kavaliersbariton*, is no less convincing as Mattes. In fact, all of the soloists distinguish themselves through their articulate pronunciation, which is crucial to a work that carries such a specific message. As this is a male-dominated opera, the few females help to lighten the musical textures: Margaret Thompson with her warm and mellow mezzo as Anna, Diana Amos as her daughter Luise, and Maria Kowollik as the alto solo at the end. Ms. Kowollik's final solo passage is accentuated by Eaton's direction; standing apart from the chorus, she represents something like the voice of the people (Ilia Iossifov emerges as her tenor equivalent). Other excellent, sharply etched character studies are presented by Richard Panzner as The Judge, Ulrich Neuweiler as the Commissar of the Great Power, Drummond Walker as his Adjutant, and by Lassi Partanen as Orth's son Jakob.

Bielefeld's production of *Die Bürgschaft* showed the work to be one of the pinnacles of Weill's oeuvre and a magnificent example of what opera (even under today's severely aggravating circumstances) is able to achieve when a group of highly motivated and dedicated artists band together. All the intendants of Germany's top-ranking opera houses should be required to attend a performance.

Horst Koegler
Stuttgart, Germany

A Question of Baloney

The Search for a Lost Translation of *The Seven Deadly Sins*

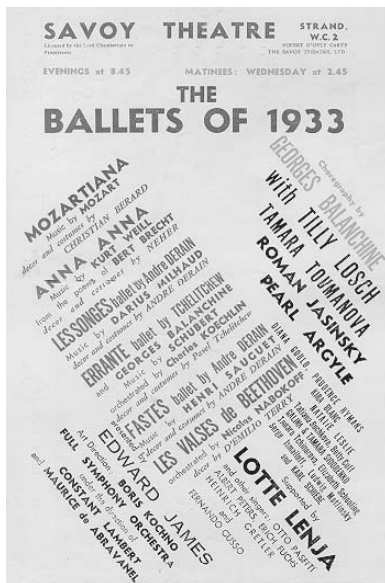
by Adam Pollock

Lenja can get into the word 'baloney' a wealth of knowingness that makes Mae West seem positively ingenue.

Footnotes often make for fascinating reading. This one, taken from *Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenja*, quotes from Constant Lambert's review of *Anna Anna*, as *Die sieben Todsünden* was billed for its London premiere in July 1933. Recently I was rereading the Weill-Lenja correspondence because there was a good chance that I would be involved in a production of the "ballet-chanté" for the 1998 Brighton Festival,

planned in conjunction with an exhibition about the man who commissioned it, Edward James.

The history of this commission is well known. James was a very rich, artistically inclined young man and a patron to many, including Magritte, Dali, and Poulenc. At a young age, he fell wildly in love with Tilly Losch, a ravishing Austrian dancer who was starring in the Noël Coward-C.B. Cochran revue *This Year of Grace*. In 1931, he persuaded her to marry him. It was a marriage made in hell, but James adored his wife and thought (mistakenly) that he could win her over by "buying" her a classical ballet company in which she could star. In December 1932, at a concert of Weill's music in



Advertisement for the London performances of Les Ballets 1933.

Paris, James met Boris Kochno, who had been a secretary and scenario writer for Diaghilev. Kochno, with the choreographer Balanchine and a small group of ex-Ballets Russes dancers, had for some months been trying desperately to launch a new company. James, a *deus ex machina* with a plump checkbook, answered their prayers. The new company was to be called "Les Ballets 1933," and its first program would include three new ballets for Tilly Losch. James had a definite proposal for the theme of one of them.

By 1933, interest in split personality and schizophrenia was so much a part of everyday life that it could serve as the subject for a Broadway musical (Gershwin's *Pardon My English*) or a popular song (Schwartz and Dietz's "Two-faced Woman" from *Flying Colors*). James was probably thinking of his wife—enchanted one moment, infuriating the next—when he suggested this subject to Kochno and the composer with whom Kochno wanted to work, Kurt Weill. From this seed grew *Die sieben Todsünden*.

According to James's plan, the ballets were to be presented in London after the Paris premiere. At some stage, James had decided that if Weill's piece was to have any success in London, it must be translated. He read music. He spoke German. He wrote. This was a job he could do himself. Thus, in spite of his duties as the impresario, he found time to translate Brecht's lyrics "to Weill's satisfaction" (his own words). So it was James who put the word "baloney" before the audience at the Savoy Theatre. Or was it?

The word is redolent of prewar gangster films. Reading the footnote in *Speak Low*, I longed to know what the rest of the text might be, especially since one biography states that Weill had actually worked on the translation with James. But apart from the words "My young sister" (evidently "Meine Schwester" at the start of the piece) and "baloney," it seemed that nothing had survived. That one word continued to gnaw away, and I wondered whether anything had been overlooked. Might there be any documentation in the Savoy archives? What about West Dean, once James's home, now a thriving arts college that he set up before he died?

As luck would have it, I knew a trustee of the James Foundation who supplied me with the name and telephone number of the archivist at West Dean, Sharon Kusonoki. I asked her whether she knew if West Dean had anything pertaining to *Anna Anna* or *Die sieben Todsünden*. She remembered some fragments of music in the "Ballets 33" file, and she would call me back. Five minutes later she did, but only to tell me there was nothing that could be an opera, only a few pieces of music with words. She also read me a letter from James in which he stated that his translation was lost. That seemed to be that. But I am mulish and Sharon is generous with her time, as well as being devoted to the many achievements of Edward James. Would she go back to check the exact words on the music she had mentioned? Five minutes later came another telephone call. Bull's-eye! When she recited the words, I knew they could only have come from *Anna Anna*. What was more, she recognized the writing as being that of Edward James.

A few days later, I sat at a table in Sussex turning over the pages of *Anna Anna*. It was now clear why no one had recognized them for what they were; nothing suggested a complete music theater piece. Each sin was a loose section on its own. Pages were interleaved with other pieces of music, some connected with Les Ballets 1933 and some not.

I started transcribing the English, which was written above the German. The Prologue was lacking. In the "Sloth" section, "Idleness is mother of all vices" was crossed out to become "Idleness is first of all the vices." Two, sometimes three, versions of a translation existed. Generally, but not always, the later one was better. Particularly interesting was a radical revision of the food in "Greed." First thoughts were of luxury foods: "Sweet meats, capons, lobster, pheasant, and those little yellow honey tartlets." These were changed into something further down the social scale: "Roast lamb, bread sauce, currants, mince pie, flaming sauce, and Christmas brandy butter." While pondering this revision, I ran into a bigger problem; halfway through "Anger," just after the quartet had sung "How the hell do they imagine that we can get a house built," the translation stopped. It picked up again for "Greed" but "Lust" was another blank. All of the words for the quartet were there, but the translation of Anna's part was missing from the middle of "Anger" to the end of the work.

Over lunch Sharon painted a graphic picture of James's surrealist way of storing things, with items of great value hidden in rubbish, which was itself encased in some *objet d'art*, and so on. This sounded like an archivist's nightmare, albeit one offering an exciting treasure hunt. After coffee, she showed me the correspondence concerning *Anna Anna*, including a charming letter from David Drew to James thanking him for having commissioned the work in the first place and raising many pertinent questions. (Drew is, of

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

56 *roast lamb bread dance currents*
p
 ♪ *Sianna, Anna* *Hörnchen!* *Schmitzel!* *Spargel!*
 ♪ *Sianna, Anna* *Brüchjes!*

Passage from “Völlerei” (“Gluttony”) with English translations of the different foods written above the staff. (Yale Music Library, MSS. 30, Ser.I.A, box 30, folder 417)

course, the hero who discovered that the scenario for the piece was not by Brecht, but by James and Kochno.) After further research, I returned to West Dean and reread James’s reply to Drew’s letter. It was, of course, written long after the events it discussed, and by now I knew enough to see that much of it was pure fiction. For instance, Weill could not have been involved in the translation because he went to Italy immediately after the opening night in Paris, and subsequent letters to him from Lenya show that she was working on the translation with James because “the other one” was unusable.

I began to wonder whether, despite what was printed in books, anyone had seriously tried to track down James’s translation before. It had not, after all, taken much ingenuity to approach West Dean. Perhaps there might be a copy in the States. Surely the conductor Maurice Abravanel must have had the words put into his score. Could it be unearthed, or might there be relevant material at the Yale University Music Library, which has a large collection of Weill-Lenya papers?

I faxed the Weill-Lenya Research Center in New York with news of what had been found so far. An enthusiastic letter came back saying that Yale did indeed have a vocal score that contained an English text, and Weill had inscribed it at the end with “16 April-4 Mai 1933 Paris, 11 Place des États-Unis,” the address of the de Noailles, with whom Weill had stayed when he wrote the piece. This meant that the Yale score matched the West Dean duplicates. I felt sure that it would contain the James translation, and I hoped it would fill in the gaps. I faxed again asking whether “baloney” was the translation of “lächerlich,” the word Anna I uses to imply that the notion she is involved with her sister’s boyfriend is “laughable.” I also asked if the phrase describing idleness was “mother of all vices” or “first of all the vices.” Either would confirm my hunch.

Time went by, but the questions surrounding the translation would not go away. Finally, on Thanksgiving day, a piece of paper slid out of my fax machine. It was a copy of the Weill-Lenya Research Center’s e-mail correspondence with Suzanne Eggleston of the Yale Music Library. She had written, “I pulled the vocal score yesterday. Faulheit is number II (2). The phrase has been translated as ‘Idleness is first of all the vices.’” It was indeed a day for thanksgiving. In due time a photocopy of the Yale score arrived. Printed in a reverse, positive image (so that you have to read it holding it up to a light), the vocal score and translation are complete.

During the course of the hunt for the translation, some useful information surfaced about the genesis of *Die sieben Todsünden*. Kochno deserves more credit than he has been given until now. He struck the deal with James. He wanted Weill on board. He gave the work its title before Brecht appeared on the scene, and, as the creator of scenarios for eight Diaghilev ballets (and the text for *Mavra*), Kochno may well have been the greatest contributor to the storyline. It also seems that Caspar Neher suggested some of the plot, while Balanchine had the idea for the famous image of the two girls under one cloak. *Die sieben Todsünden* was indeed a “Gesamtkunstwerk,” not in the Wagnerian sense, but “gesamt” in

that the entire creative team devised it, with Brecht more marginally involved than usual. Without James’s ideas and money, however, the ballet would never have existed. The world would be a poorer place, especially because the existence of Les Ballets 1933 led directly to the creation of The New York City Ballet.

And the translation? The first question people ask is, “Is it any good?” It was done in a hurry. Stresses occasionally fall in the wrong place, and some note values are changed. Some editing is needed, but the answer is generally “yes.” The translation is a wonderfully apposite mixture of biblical homily and 1930s slang. The various “versions” may be accounted for as follows: James made the initial translation by himself, then possibly he showed it to Weill. But Weill left for Italy, leaving work on the translation fall to Lenya. Although her English was not then fluent, Lenya could explain to James that the language needed to be colloquial, more Bronx and less Mayfair. She then literally sat with James, spurring him on. So, a phrase like “Greediness is venal” became “Love of food is lousy.” “Money” is often “dough,” and Anna’s family warns her not to rob people of their “last red cent.” Only once, in “Lust,” does James eradicate Brecht’s socio-political agenda when, rather than explaining that people can only do what they like if they are financially independent, Anna I simply points out the risks of dangling two men on one hook. But otherwise the translation is lively and viable.

And “baloney”? Ironically the word that started off the hunt appears in neither the Yale nor West Dean scores. The word “lächerlich” is left untranslated. So, who knows? I may still be proven right.

64 *And y' heavy like you have nei-ter when the clock*
and-re hat nichts zu la-chen, wenn sie einmal
have to go to see your man *By*
ihre Situation ver-gisst. *Leider*
Man of-ten see Avarice *Man was ho-lybreken us*
traf ich den A-delfund öfter. *Es war gar nichts zuwischen*
most-lächerlich! Man-freudig An-na sagt es and im-
man *A-ber An-na-situation sind leider! stürzte*

Full page from “Habsucht” (“Avarice”). (Yale Music Library, MSS. 30, Ser.I.A, box 30, folder 417)

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Books

Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory: Marxism, Modernity and the Threepenny Lawsuit

by Steve Giles

Berne: Peter Lang, 1997. 202 pp.

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Three things resulted from Brecht's first involvement with a major film project: a court case on the question of his and Weill's rights in the stage-to-screen version of *The Threepenny Opera*; a lengthy, dense, at times brilliantly, at times speciously argued treatise on the conclusions to be drawn from the case and the court's judgment; and the film itself. Steve Giles's study addresses the first two of these at some length.

In the first two of seven chapters Giles focuses on the case itself (referred to as "the *Beule* Suit"—which may or may not have seemed at the time a drolly custom-tailored pun) and on copyright theory pertaining to moral rights and economics. He devotes the greater part of the study to a consideration of Brecht's responses to logical empiricism and social behaviorism, to Karl Korsch's brand of Marxism, and to a development of accounts of ideology, social-scientific method, and the theory-praxis relationship as part of a response to, and critique of, Walter Benjamin's and Korsch's ideas. To conclude, he considers the contemporary relevance of *Der Dreigroschenprozess*.

In one sense, the case for the "contemporary" relevance of *Der Dreigroschenprozess* was made earlier in the book, and I suspect that I might not be alone in finding the gallop through and around fields signposted post/structuralism, anti-humanism, the death of the author, paradigm shifts, and post-modern, sociotemporal, cultural, radicalized and sociological modernity(-ies?) exhausting. Moreover, given that Giles entitles the last chapter "Pipped at the Post," one is tempted to borrow the equine analogy and suggest that this particular nag is handicapped by being asked to carry too much weight. That the track also features a few too many hurdles is also hinted at by the author's roping together of stylistic and critical solecisms. On the one hand, he concedes that there is "a Brecht . . . of whom it might be said . . . 'My name is Brecht: and there's a helluva lot of us'" (p. 169); on the other, he solemnly asserts that he has "the rather more modest aim of exploring the, or an/other, Brecht synchronically." Looking to place a bet on any of these particular runners, one is tempted to fall back on Roy Campbell's quip: "But where's the bloody horse?" In another sense, the absolutely contemporary relevance of the case and Brecht's methods of argument might be viewed in a different light, given the recent court case brought by his heirs in Germany and the subsequent decision to prevent distribution of Heiner Müller's *Germania 3: Gespenster am toten Mann* because of questions of "intellectual property."

The most valuable contributions the book makes to Brecht scholarship are the clear, measured, and well-researched details of the lawsuit itself, the chronology of the collaboration between Brecht, Weill, and Nero Film AG, the reasons for the judgment, and the setting of the relevant issues—authorship, moral rights, intellectual property, adaptation of an existing script—within the context of court rulings from the period. Giles leads the reader

through a thicket of legal rulings, clarifications of previous judgments, and contemporary commentaries on the case with a sure sense of what is important. Somewhat puzzling, however, is his (presumably deliberate) decision to devote no space to a consideration of Kurt Weill's position in the events. Surely some discussion of the details of Weill's case and the decision in his favor would have thrown more light on Brecht's case and its failure. Moreover, the correspondence between Weill and Universal Edition would have been a valuable source for establishing just how accurate Brecht's assessment of the behavior of the film people might have been. Even Weill writes (28 September 1930) that "everything is happening in continuous breach of our contracts"(!); and on 9 October 1930 he asserts that he has "to protest against the kitsch being manufactured," going on to describe the methods as the sort of thing "one only thought possible in Wild West novels."

In the discussion of *Der Dreigroschenprozess* itself, Giles takes the opportunity to point to Brecht's often economical (in several senses) approach to facts and his ability *ex post facto* to present details and issues in a way that best suits an already predetermined method of argument. This is not to deny the importance of *Der Dreigroschenprozess* and the sometimes dazzling, often inconsistent, and always provocative arguments, expositions, and commentaries that Brecht offers on questions such as the relationship between knowledge and production, capital and art and culture, ideology and ideas, theory and praxis. But while Giles's establishment of elective affinities between Brecht and Benjamin (especially in the case of the latter's crucial essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction") is revealing, it sometimes seems as if he thinks Brecht and Benjamin to be writers with a shared approach to fundamental cultural and ideological issues. That this was far from the case is borne out by Brecht's critical comments on Benjamin's "aura" theory (*Journals*, 25 July 1938), a detail assigned to a footnote on page 165 without further substantive discussion. Such differences of attitude between the two were more often than not a reflection of Brecht's views on the relationship between form (or rather style) and content—views which were conditioned by his own fondness for "plumpes Denken," for sentences which "intervened" or "engaged" (*Gesammelte Werke* 20, p. 173), and for a treatment of complex issues with concise and clear language (*Briefe*, p. 300). Such observations might usefully be heeded by today's paraders of "lit-crit" positions, most of whose writings are notable for a combination of prolixity and hectoring, pontificating shrillness.

While there may well be analogies between some of Brecht's views and the positions of some contemporary theorists, it is well to remember that the Brecht (not, in this case, one of many) who wrote to Benjamin that he admired his essay on Eduard Fuchs ("there's not a touch of decoration, but everything is elegant (in the good old sense)" [*Briefe*, p. 325]) and who sought, only partly in jest, assurances from Helene Weigel that the sentences in Korsch's Marx book were "still nice and short" (*Briefe*, p. 273), would have had little hesitation in branding many of today's proficient purveyors of intellectual commodities as exemplary (and hence deplorable) Tuis.

Michael Morley
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Tui: from the initials of the reversed *T*ellekt-*U*ell-*I*n, a term Brecht used to refer pejoratively to "landlords of the intellect" and "intellectuals of the era of the marketplaces and commodities," who excel in phrase-mongering, jargon deployment, and obscurantism. They are at the center of his *Turoman* and the play *Turandot*.

Books

Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim

by Geoffrey Block

New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 410 pp.
ISBN 0-19-510791-8

In his engagingly titled new study Geoffrey Block provides a close-up look at fourteen musicals and then, in a structurally divergent final chapter, assesses Sondheim's career. Happily, among Block's selected musicals are two by Kurt Weill, *Lady in the Dark* and *One Touch of Venus*, and Marc Blitzstein's labor musical, *The Cradle Will Rock*. His other choices—including *Porgy and Bess*, *Pal Joey*, *Carousel*, *My Fair Lady*, and *West Side Story*—are, by design, entirely unsurprising: Block is not a contentious revisionist, a prickly, oedipal firebrand determined to dismantle the canon. He is a classicist eager to acknowledge the fact that the Broadway musical indeed has a pantheon worthy of serious critical attention.

Following an "Overture" ("Setting the Stage") Block divides his survey into two "acts," "Before Rodgers and Hammerstein" and "The Broadway Musical after *Oklahoma!*" While *Carousel* is the only Rodgers and Hammerstein show singled out for a chapter of its own, the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play is invoked throughout as the genre's Platonic ideal. But it is typical of Block's generosity that he finds merit on both sides of the great divide of *Oklahoma!*; he writes in his introduction, "the song and dance musical comedies that prevailed in the 1920s and 1930s and the integrated musicals that became more influential in the 1940s and 1950s both allow a meaningful dramatic relationship between songs and their shows."

Suffused with enthusiasm, decency, and common sense, Block is a nimble and exacting maestro. In a notably self-effacing style—his goal is to showcase the works rather than his own analytical ingenuity—Block accomplishes the essential task of all good criticism: he enables us to see the musicals with a greater depth than we could likely manage on our own, and, by fortifying us with his insights, encourages a return to the shows for another look. Under Block's baton, familiar, indeed unavoidable, topics acquire urgency and heightened significance: for instance, the kind and degree of integration between a show's music and its book, between the sung and spoken word, between choreography and natural movement; the conflicting claims of musical authenticity vs. musical accessibility; and the pressures, emotional as well as artistic, of laboring in a commercial and collaborative medium. Block guides us through each show from the first light of initial conception, through pre-production, rehearsals, and tryouts, and up to opening night and beyond, at each step considering why, where, and how musical material was added, trimmed, excised, or rearranged. He assesses how shows were received by their original audiences and considers the musicals' legacies on records and discs, in revivals and critical standing.

In his introduction Block notes that, until recently, books on musical theater have been written by journalists or theater historians who slighted the musical contributions. Filling the gap, Block brings a musicologist's expertise to a dissection of how melody, har-

mony, counterpoint, rhythm, leitmotifs, meter, pitch, and orchestration function on the Broadway stage. Although Block claims that "the language of the analysis is intended to be accessible to readers unversed in musical vocabulary," the diction in his musicological passages is likely to be troublesome for the lay reader; nonetheless, the author's pledge to focus on "the musical expression of dramatic meanings and dramatic context" yields fertile insights to theorist and layman alike. Block's procedure is to focus on a few representative numbers from each show, suggesting ways in which music illuminates mood or character, or provides a narrative climax.

Not surprisingly, Block's chapter on Weill, "*Lady in the Dark* and *One Touch of Venus*: The Broadway Stranger and His American Dreams," is wonderfully fair-minded, an all-too-rare instance of a critic judging the Broadway work on its own merits rather than in disillusioned comparison to the composer's European oeuvre. Block is neither shocked by nor disapproving of Weill's adjustment to the demands of Broadway, nor does he feel the fact that Weill's chief competitor was Richard Rodgers rather than Paul Hindemith presupposed a falling off in musical accomplishment. To make the case for Weill's Broadway works, Block does not devalue the composer's landmark collaborations with Brecht or his modernist concert pieces; rather, like Weill himself, Block appreciates good music wherever he finds it. Significantly, Block chooses for examination Weill's two biggest successes. While the two shows may have conformed in some respects to prevailing standards, Block correctly cites their decidedly experimental elements, the extended musical scenes in the three mini-operettas in *Lady in the Dark*, the extended compositions for Agnes de Mille's ballets in *One Touch of Venus*.

The author traces the "process by which" fragments of *A Kingdom for a Cow*, *Happy End*, and *Marie Galante* "reemerge[d] in *Lady in the Dark* and *One Touch of Venus*," suggesting "a deeper than generally acknowledged connection between the aesthetic and working methods of the European and the American Weills." Block also places Weill's adherence to "a gestic music based on rhythm" as a major, "demonstrable" link between the composer's methods in Berlin and on Broadway. Provocatively, he notes that the way songs often interrupt the action in *One Touch of Venus* provides an echo of the epic theater aesthetic Weill developed with Brecht. "'That's Him,'" Block argues, "is representative of Weill's earlier ideal by distancing the singer from the object and providing a commentary on love rather than an experience of it." Lamenting Weill's exclusion from recent surveys of the Broadway musical and the notable absence of fully-staged revivals, Block sees Weill as an important Broadway artist whose work fuses popular with classical tendencies and whose bold, astutely theatrical approaches to the interaction between score and libretto had a sizeable impact on the development of the post-Rodgers and Hammerstein musical.

Although he has personally overcome the traditional academic disdain for the Broadway musical, to which he was exposed as a musicology student in the early 1970s. Block has not entirely forgotten it. There are lingering traces here of a keen graduate student trying to convince his fuddy-duddy elders that the best Broadway musicals really are not a guilty pleasure, a place "merely" of "enchanted evenings," but a subject worthy of sober academic inquiry. Block's writing advocates a theatrical tradition, for which, as his own rigorous analysis attests, there is absolutely no need to apologize.

Foster Hirsch
New York City

Performances

The Threepenny Opera

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Wilma Theater

In repertory

December 1997–January 1998

When John Gay and Johann Christoph Pepusch wrote *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728 to parody the wildly popular operas of Handel and to poke fun at societal flaws, the plot and characters offered a somewhat unsavory view of life. Weill-Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper* was an even nastier parody in 1928, when Germany was recovering from defeat after World War I, emerging from the depths of a depression, and experiencing intense protest from the Left and menace from the Right.

Brecht and Weill updated *The Beggar's Opera* to 1837 to satirize the era of Queen Victoria's coronation. Blanka Zizka, Wilma



M.C. (Forrest McClendon). Photo: Mark Garvin.

Theater's director of *The Threepenny Opera*, updated that updating to 1925, just in time for the inauguration of President Coolidge in the midst of the Roaring Twenties, when the dollar was more almighty than ever and the less fortunate were even less so than usual. Actually, what Ms. Zizka had in mind was more complex: she staged a play-within-a-play, showing the original Weill-Brecht work (set in 1837) being presented in 1925 by a radical theater

troupe in an off-Philadelphia venue. This dramaturgical trick allowed for the effective use of 1920's costumes and powerfully gruesome World War I tattered uniforms, gas masks, and related combat paraphernalia. Larisa Ratnikoff's costumes ideally complemented Andrei Efrimoff's brilliant unit set, which featured in-out-up-down-back-and-forth modifications such as only the technical capabilities of the new Wilma could allow. Among the scenic highlights: an ever-visible brick wall, painted with graffiti slogans appropriate to the time (1925) and circumstances (poverty versus riches, crime for all, etc.); a jail cell with a frame that burst into quick-moving marquee lights when

Macheath and his jailer began a tap routine; balconies hovering over stage right and left, where Polly and Lucy warbled their operatic duet-parody of jealousy over their mutual "husband," Macheath; and, off to stage right, the ever-present small stage band deftly led by Music Director Adam Wernick. Unfortunately, 1925 superimposed itself awkwardly on the plot, and text references to the coronation, London, and other things British frequently jarred the theatrical sense—and senses.

Some of the cast was quite good, especially Forrest McClendon as the Street Singer cum clown-as-ringmaster; John Seitz as a quintessentially sleazy Peachum; Robin Miles as a sexy Jenny; Lynn Eldridge as a fully embodied (vocally as well as visually) Mrs. Peachum; and Anthony Lawton as the distraught, bedeviling Police Chief Tiger Brown. Linda Pierson, as Lucy, demonstrated a good voice in the duet and an acute sense of timing in the "poisoning" scene (thanks to Zizka's direction).

Unfortunately, the two protagonists, Raphael Nash Thompson (Macheath) and Miriam Shor (Polly), made, respectively, nothing and too much of everything they



Macheath (Raphael Nash Thompson) with Jenny (Robin Miles). Photo: Mark Garvin.

did or sang. Macheath must dominate the evening by being charismatic, sexy, and seductive. None of these adjectives describes Mr. Thompson's stage persona. I suspect that Mr. McClendon, the Street Singer, who made a hit with the "Ballad of Mack the Knife," might have come closer to the ideal Macheath. Ms. Shor, perhaps in a desperate attempt to get some energy out of her partner, overacted and over-sang most of the time, which is a shame, because she has both wit and voice, as demonstrated in her side of the "poisoning scene"—a perfect foil for Ms. Pierson's.

Excessive emoting, gesticulating, and yelling, in the style that is so typical of situation comedy, marred much of this *Threepenny Opera*. The evening also suffered from lifelessness, which is not surprising given a weak central figure and too much frivolous activity. A new, 1998 American-style finale, in which Macheath gets a reprieve, a book deal, and a film offer, brought the updating—and the show—to an utterly superfluous end.

Susan Gould
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Performances

Der Silbersee

Freiburg, Germany

Freiburger Theater

In repertory

November 1997–June 1998

As with most of his stage works, Weill created *Der Silbersee* as part of an ongoing effort to liberate opera from its then-current crisis by ridding it of the dust accumulated during the nineteenth century and opening it up to a broad, modern audience. Contemporary opera demanded new approaches, and Weill stood at the forefront of those who pursued this goal by experimenting with different solutions in each new work. In July 1932, while planning *Silbersee*, Weill wrote to Universal Edition that the work was to be “in no way an opera,” but “rather a work that stands in between genres.” The finished composition hovers somewhere between opera and straight play, but in terms of its musical demands, it lies closer to *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* than to *Die Dreigroschenoper*. If *Dreigroschenoper* calls for a cast of singing actors and *Mahagonny* a cast of singers who can act, there seems to be no clear recipe for *Silbersee*, save for choosing a cast that can sing *and* act. Such a cast is even harder to assemble today than in Weill’s time, however, when a lively revue and folk-theater tradition could produce talent like the singer and folk actor Ernst Busch, who played Severin in the Magdeburg production of *Silbersee* in February 1933.

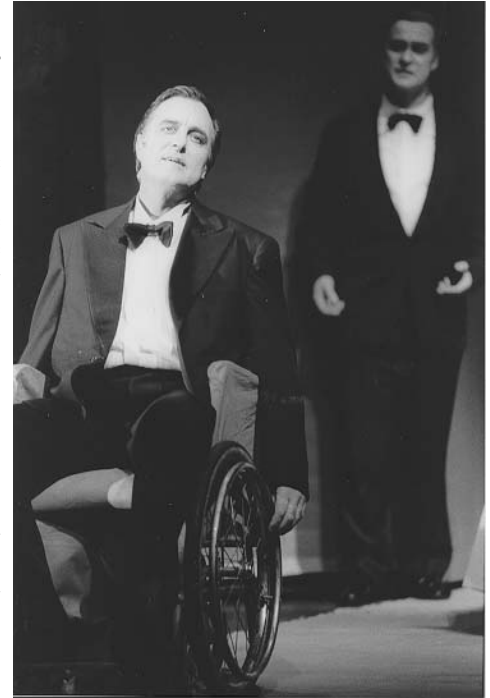
The Freiburger Theater production cast all the musical roles with singers—even Olim and Frau von Luber, characters who sing just one number but must maintain a strong stage presence throughout. The results on stage were largely



Fennimore (Sabine Hogrefe). Photo: Klaus Fröhlich

convincing, especially when measured against the standard of what an operatic ensemble is generally able to achieve. This held true even in those places where the obviously different talents of pure actors (e.g., Alexander Saas as the Doctor and Georg Blumreiter as the Fat Country Policeman) and acting singers could not be concealed. Two of the performers managed the acting and singing demands with equal fluency: Sabine Hogrefe as Fennimore and Joke Kramer as Frau von Luber (memorable from her wonderfully spiteful performance as Emma Jones in the Freiburg production of *Street Scene* two years ago). Wolfgang Newerla, who performed the role of Olim, and Rüdiger Wohlers, cast as Severin, are clearly opera singers, yet they both handled their acting roles magnificently—especially Newerla, whose sympathetic demeanor fit the role of Olim very well. Musically, however, Newerla’s excellent tenor voice was not sufficiently challenged by the role.

Stage director Peter Gruber, on loan to the Freiburg *Silbersee* production from the Wiener Volkstheater, cut straight to the heart of the matter and focused on the role of Fennimore. No longer the innocent, virginal child who begs for entry into Olim’s castle, she is now a plump youth whose coarse, heavy movements cannot be disguised by evening dress. Although she speaks her mind, her heart is in the right place; if she spoke with the relevant dialect, she would be a true “Berliner Göre” [Berlin brat]. Instead of a *femme fatale*, we now find a meek character whose superhuman quality manifests itself in, of all things, an aura of submissive naivete. This “dethroned” Fennimore fits astonishingly well into Kaiser’s text—his messages suddenly seem simple, natural, and normal. “He who has to go forward just does it,” Fennimore seems to say, as if this was the most natural thing in the world: human need rather than mission, logical consequence rather than miracles.



Severin (Rüdiger Wohlers), with Olim (Wolfgang Newerla) in the background. Photo: Klaus Fröhlich

Gruber’s second trick is to insert a drastic “grand pause” in the music when Olim and Severin walk to the Silver Lake. The sudden silence creates a startling effect—so startling, in fact, that some in the audience, thinking that the work was over, began to applaud. The silence is intended to transform the storyline from one of realistic action to one of parable. Instead of serving as a “real miracle,” the freezing of the lake can thus be understood as a symbol—one that the chorus members, who by now have taken off their masks, explain to the audience as flesh-and-blood human beings.

The Freiburger Theater has found in Patrik Ringborg a conductor who is capable of bringing deep understanding and feeling to Weill’s music. Although Ringborg accelerated many of the *tempi* daringly, he was able to achieve a fine musical sensitivity. Similarly, he handled the play of contrasts, which he always knew how to control, in correct proportions. Overall, the Freiburg production of *Silbersee* may be regarded as a successful, even exemplary, staging.

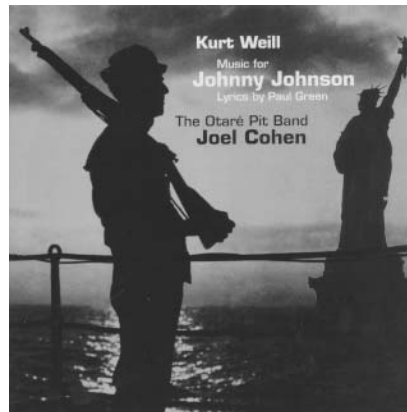
Elisabeth Schwind
Freiburg, Germany

Recordings

Johnny Johnson

The Otaré Pit Band
Joel Cohen, conductor

Erato 0630-17870-2



It is difficult to imagine Kurt Weill's American experience without *Johnny Johnson*, his first work for the theater written entirely in the United States. At the urging of his new friend, producer Cheryl Crawford, Weill found in Paul Green's book an ideal forum in which to contend with his two selves in the new way that his migration demanded. For the last fifteen years of his life, the period of his American exile, Weill would not only have to continue to reject his German art music heritage in favor of populist aspirations, he would also need to reconcile this dichotomy with a new, "American" voice in order to speak the language his Broadway and Hollywood audiences understood. (The failure of the initial American production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in 1933 may be significant in this regard.) That he was able to find "paradise" (to use Arnold Schoenberg's word for southern California) in exile so quickly, and make it so bountiful, speaks to Weill's remarkable aesthetic decisiveness. *Johnny* thus stands at this last fork in the composer's ongoing "Road of Promise." While this pivotal position in Weill's career has been appreciated in one manner or another since the work's premiere, *Johnny* is one of those pieces (found in most composer's catalogs) that, while important, is somehow more often mentioned than truly known. A new recording of the work, only its second (and the first in more than forty years), offers an authoritative version that affords scholars, students, and performers alike the chance to reconcile ongoing historical inquiry with new performance evidence.

Mounted by the famous Group Theatre and directed by one of the Group's founders, Lee Strasberg, the first produc-

tion of *Johnny Johnson* opened on Broadway at the Forty-Fourth Street Theater on 19 November 1936. Despite a remarkable cast and conscientious and laborious efforts at cutting and reworking, it tallied only sixty-eight performances.

Alongside its notable fellow shows of the 1936–37 Broadway season, *Johnny* surely had the clearest sense of the future, both in terms of Weill's career and in the development of American musical theater. Sigmund Romberg and Otto Harbach's *Forbidden Melody* was certainly not challenging when it opened in November 1936. *The Show Is On*, which featured the music of virtually every important Broadway composer and lyricist (Arlen and Harburg, Carmichael, Duke, the Gershwins, Rodgers and Hart, and Schwartz and Dietz, among others), was a Christmas-time revue and surely garnered its two hundred-plus performances because it gave the public exactly what it wanted. Cole Porter's *Red, Hot and Blue!* and Rodgers and Hart's *Babes in Arms*, the latter the most successful musical of the year, similarly catered to the public's expectations.

But *Johnny* spoke to the critics if not to a vast American audience. In his review of the first production, Marc Blitzstein discovered the work's "velvet propaganda" not predominantly via Green's satirical story but in Weill's "confounding sureness which outlasts transient dicta concerning bad taste and lack of it." Many of the work's potent points were either too progressive or simply premature for Weill's early American audience to resolve upon first exposure, and if *Johnny's* European-ness still engendered a sense of "experiment" about it, Blitzstein did recognize that Weill was fitting right into his new

home by offering up "a new form to the musical theater." (Blitzstein's own *The Cradle Will Rock* of the following season would already show the effects of this new form.) Although Weill had not yet mastered the language, Lorenz Hart recognized that mastery as only a matter of time. At the first performance of *Johnny* (as reported in Stanley Green's Weill entry in *The World of Musical Comedy*), he leaned over the composer's shoulder and said: "What are you trying to do, put people like me out of business?" He did not mean simply that Weill was outsmarting Rodgers and Hart. Here was something new.

Weill quickly reconciled a traditional European sensibility with his desire to reach a wide audience in his new environment. Two years later, *Knickerbocker Holiday* gained 100 performances more than *Johnny*. Aided by the catchy American vernacular of Ira Gershwin, *Lady in the Dark* (1941) gained 300 more. And with Ogden Nash's lyrics, *One Touch of Venus* (1943) gained 100 more still, Weill's biggest commercial success ever, aside from *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

Johnny led the way toward the liberation of Weill's talents. It was produced at a time when "folk legend" was the latest thing. The word "legend" in book-writer Paul Green's subtitle brings to mind DuBose Heyward's "folk drama" *Porgy*, which served as the basis for Gershwin's "folk opera" *Porgy and Bess*. But the specific kind of musical satire prevalent in *Johnny* is surely closer to the three political operettas on books by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind that the Gershwins produced in the early years of the Great Depression: *Strike Up The Band* (1927; rev. 1930); *Of Thee I Sing* (1931); and *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933). This was a time when supplanting comedy with higher-browed satire was a chic way to reach beyond Broadway towards the opera house. *Johnny* accomplishes all of this without exactly knowing it. The very lack of self-consciousness may, in part, have been what allowed it to come and go so quickly and fade into oblivion once Weill began writing hits. In the last years of Weill's career, though, its example reached that higher plane called posterity in the assuredly "operatic" works *Street Scene* (1947) and *Lost in the Stars* (1949).

At the time of the first recording of *Johnny* (1956), performances of the work were dependent upon the problematic (numerous cuts, transpositions, etc.) 1940 piano-vocal score. By contrast, the new

Erato recording utilizes as its basis Lys Symonette's 1971 "complete" performing edition, which undertook to incorporate all the performable elements of the show contained in the extant manuscripts. Anyone who knows anything about the theater realizes that completeness and authenticity are not necessarily the same thing. A comparison between David Drew's detailed inventory (*Kurt Weill: A Handbook*, pp. 276-77) of the first production's contents and the liner notes accompanying this new recording shows that what is here is not merely an attempt to recreate the original; decisions have been made that sculpt a finer work profile than that suggested by the extant materials. Yet in the absence of the new, critical edition of *Johnny* being prepared under the auspices of the Weill Foundation, this new recording is surely the best representation of the work to date.

To my ears, the instrumental passages are the real star of this show. The Otaré Pit Band recreates the sound of Weill's original orchestration with all its cabaret quirkiness. The provocative sound of the accordion, the composer's characteristically understated yet suave treatment of the saxophone, the use of guitar and banjo, and, most of all, the movie-house quality of the Hammond electric organ (still fairly novel in 1936), all create the vivid sense of nostalgia necessary to appreciate *Johnny* as the period piece that it is. Given the limitations of the recording medium, the crowd scenes are effectively presented and the spoken material convincingly delivered.

The solo singing is consistent, if unremarkable; the vocalists do the best they can with the likewise consistently lackluster lyrics. The few numbers which stand out as highlights are three of those published by Chappell in 1936 as would-be "hit" songs: "Oh Heart of Love," "Oh the Rio Grande," and "Johnny's Song" (retitled for publication as "To Love You And To Lose You").

The liner notes are scholarly and interesting. A single photograph from the first production (showing the cannons from Act II's "Song of the Guns") is an added bonus. The entirety of Joel Cohen's adapted text (including dialogues and stage directions) is reproduced in the accompanying booklet, although the headings of the tracks indicated there do not always agree with the list of tracks at the front of the notes. Following along with the book makes listening to this seventy-five minute recording something more dramatic than merely hearing the score.

Perhaps the only element missing is the kind of conviction one tends to sense when a stage production moves into the recording studio. Leonard Bernstein, John McGlinn, and others have demonstrated that recordings purely from the studio need not be any less committed than those following an actual production, but the present recording does lack a general sense of energy.

A last reservation might be raised by revisiting that term "complete." Incomplete explanation is provided for the

choices that are made concerning what is included and what is excluded from this recording. One laments that the producers did not go one step further and include recorded appendices and a detailed explanation of all the cut music, a procedure successfully carried out on EMI's landmark recording of *Show Boat*. While *Johnny Johnson* is surely no *Show Boat*, the American musical theater is as indebted to Kurt Weill as it is to Jerome Kern. We need this whole piece!

Despite its minor shortcomings, this recording is to be applauded for the polished way it carries out the task it sets for itself. It is a splendid complement to Cohen's substantial catalog of recordings that feature underrepresented traditions informed by lessons learned from the historical performance movement. As a valuable supplement to the recorded history of the American musical theater at a very important time in its development, and as an invaluable installment in the recorded legacy of Weill's music, it should stay in print for years to come. To say that it needs to be followed by an authoritative printed edition, and from that hopefully an inventive production, is preaching to the choir.

With *Johnny Johnson*, Weill solidified his contact with America and took the first steps toward making it his new home. Given Weill's uneven reputation upon his arrival, the challenges this show issued to Broadway paradigms, and the dire economic conditions of the time, it is not at all surprising that the show fared so poorly with audiences. But the critics, most notably Weill's fellow artists, saw its value immediately and welcomed him into their community. The work may come off as an Americanization of some aspects of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, but it is important to note that Green's book is not Brecht's epic. Weill's score, with its maze of self-referencing that so much deserves further study, strives—if prematurely for its audience—for a new sensibility in which popular song and popular idioms offer liberation from the confines of *Zeitoper*. Yet, to say that he began here a quest that would soon Americanize him neither captures the transitional nature of *Johnny* nor does it appreciate the arch of his American experience generally. The simplicity of *Johnny* belies its example of a compositional spirit liberating itself under the harshest of personal circumstances.

John Andrew Johnson
Syracuse University



A scene from the original 1936 production of *Johnny Johnson*.

Recordings

Bertolt Brecht

Werke

Eine Auswahl

BMG 74321501942

I remember hearing a few years ago that the works of Samuel Beckett were going to be available on videotape, in performances directed by Beckett himself and with actors he had chosen as the ideal incarnation of his characters. The tapes, I was told, would be distributed to producers worldwide to be used as models for all future productions. Thus would the whole world learn how to “do Beckett” and do him “right.”

The scheme (if there really was such a scheme) was aborted by Beckett’s final illness and death. That it existed at all, albeit as less than a practical plan, tells us that even the Beckett people were, in that era, influenced by the Brecht people. Brecht spent the last half dozen years of his life creating *Modellbücher* (Model Books) of his principal plays. These were to be sent out to producers to tell them how to “do it right.”

The age of videotapes had not yet arrived, and audio materials were circulated only on 78s or LPs. Sometimes a whole play would be made available on such discs: for instance, *Die Gewehre der Frau Carrar* with Helene Weigel in the title role. But if you wanted, say, *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* in model form, it was to Brecht’s model book that you had to go. A feature film of *Mutter Courage* was also made but was not held by the orthodox to be a model, even though it was used as such by Jerome Robbins as late as 1963 for the Broadway production.

Robbins’s experience is instructive. He told me afterwards that he wished he had not consulted the film but had operated freely, as with a new work about whose background he knew nothing. I myself began to rethink the whole matter of Brecht performance. Brecht’s *Modellbücher* approach—producing the plays himself and documenting the results—was originally quite justified. But there was a fundamental flaw in the thinking. A mode of theatrical production cannot be ren-

dered permanent by decree, nor yet by model books. Even videotapes would not have done the job—for Samuel Beckett or any other original playwright. One has only to think of the history of Shakespeare production to see how good dramatic writing adapts itself to the theater’s ever-changing conditions. *Macbeth* can be acted perfectly well on a proscenium stage with our hero in the costume of an eighteenth-century aristocrat with lace at his wrists. Even the classic tragedies—originally performed before thousands in the glorious open air of Greece—can be highly effective indoors on the Bowery in New York, before an audience of a hundred or so and acted in a manner clearly influenced by modern naturalism à la Stanislavsky.

These reflections were prompted by *Bertolt Brecht: Werke, eine Auswahl*, twenty CDs issued in a boxed set by BMG. Ten of the twenty are recordings of Berliner Ensemble productions of plays: namely, *Frau Carrar*, *Leben des Galilei*, *Mutter Courage*, *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis*, *Die Tage der Commune*, and *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*. I defy anyone, in these days of abundant video cassettes, to sit through all these audio performances. The musical bits are certainly a refreshing interruption, but the seemingly endless prose will surely send even the most ardent Brechtian to sleep in short order. I suppose these texts are presented here mainly for purposes of consultation rather than entertainment, yet I predict that the consultants will be antiquarians and scholars, not

dramaturges, directors, and actors. They will know not to follow supposed models but to confront the text afresh with every production, as they attempt to do with Shakespeare or any classic.

Of course, in such matters there is usually an “on the other hand.” No actor today would venture to imitate Henry Irving or Forbes Robertson in Shakespeare. Yet hearing their voices and their now antiquated mode may remind one of values unhappily lost and perhaps in small part recoverable; an ingredient may be detected that could, if recaptured, enrich a new performance. (Charles Laughton enhanced one of his interpretations by studying a recording of the abdication speech of Edward VIII.)

True-believing Brechtians will argue that some of the performances recorded here are definitive, but I would aver that no performance is definitive in a classic role because the possibility always remains open for a new and different performance that is just as good. Was Helene Weigel’s performance as Mother Courage definitive? By no means: Therese Giehse was just as powerful and expressive in the role a year or so after Weigel first did it.

It is important, then, that no purchaser of this set think he or she is acquiring the definitive demonstration of *anything*.



Bertolt Brecht in 1927. Photo: Konrad Ressler.



Helene Weigel in a 1949 Berliner Ensemble production of *Mutter Courage*.

More than forty years have passed since Brecht died. Can we, after all this time, hope that such a Selected Works project would give us the best performances, ever or anywhere, of what some competent judge deems the very best of Brecht? Well, no, because not all such items have been recorded, and the rights to those that have may be unavailable or too expensive. There is also an ideological barrier. Among the credits cited in the album are thanks for support from Barbara Schall-Brecht, the company over which she has long had something more than just influence (Berliner Ensemble), and her German publisher (Suhrkamp Verlag). That support was a *sine qua non* because Brecht's works are still under copyright in Germany, and his heirs guard them hyperactively, forbidding some performances altogether and micro-managing those that they allow. To some degree their choices go by personal caprice and favoritism but, in Germany especially, there is politics in them: Bertolt Brecht's own politics for the most part, but politics that in 1998 will certainly seem dated even to those who do not consider them pestiferous.

Soviet Communism survives in Germany in the form of Leninism—supposedly uncontaminated-by-Stalinism. On this basis, Brecht's politics survive the German Democratic Republic, whose leaders stand accused of letting Leninism down, nothing more. A film has been made

(and broadcast in Canada) on the life of Hanns Eisler. It is an outright Communist film, beginning and ending with the Brecht-Eisler song *Lob des Kommunismus* and with a reverent rendition of the GDR's national anthem—an Eisler composition—in the middle. There is nothing so blatant in the BMG set, but one must not take as accidental that, where so many major works are missing, there are examples of Party hackwork (*Frau Carrar*) and purely ideological ardor (parts of the *Communist Manifesto* versified).

Among major works not included are: *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, and all the great products of Brecht's youth, *Baal*, *Im Dickicht der Städte*, *Leben Eduards des Zweiten von England*, even *Mann ist Mann* (which the Berliner Ensemble performed as early as thirty years ago). A television film exists of *Baal*—a major work, with Fassbinder in the title role—but no part of this is here either. The impression given throughout the series is that of Eisler playing a larger role than Kurt Weill. Eisler's music for *Die Tage der Commune*—a minor work, I think—is here in its entirety while *Die Dreigroschenoper* is represented only by a group of songs.

This collection does not incorporate all or even most of the finer recordings of the past. There is not nearly enough Lotte Lenya here. At least her magnificent solo rendering of *Happy End* (1960, Columbia/Philips) should be included (even though the prose dialogue of the show is not Brecht's), as should her *Sieben Todsünden* (1956, Columbia/Philips). Nor is a more recent generation of performers represented: no Teresa Stratas, no Ute Lemper. If an English-language item could be used, as is Brecht's testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, then at least Charles Laughton's voice should be heard (from *Galileo*). From abundant French sources the LP of *Schweyk im zweiten Weltkrieg* could well have been chosen (another Eisler score, but this one possibly his very best). A Kurt Weill landmark in my experience was Otto Klemperer's early recording (1931) of *Kleine Dreigroschenmusik*. We older Brechtians could keep this game going forever, although it is unfair. Anthologists must work with their own prejudices and predilections, not other people's.

A booklet of more than eighty pages accompanies this collection, providing a lot of good information besides presenting the

editorial point of view. However, it is in German only and offers no Brecht texts. (Instead, an advertisement appears for the works as published by Suhrkamp! In this, BMG is behaving no worse than many other CD companies.) I treasure my old *Mahagonny* LPs not least because included with them is the complete German text and a very exact translation, both an enormous boon to the listener. (Because Brecht was always issuing different versions of his plays, one may not otherwise have access to the text in the same form.)

As for the sonic quality of these CDs, one has become aware in the past few years that old recordings are not always better on CD. To be sure, the crackle and other irrelevant noise are removed, but so, quite often, is some of the sound of the music. My listening was not done on first-rate equipment, but suffice it to say that I have no complaints.

Let's not be above nostalgia or even sentimentality. Nothing in this field is more fun to listen to than the earliest recordings of *Dreigroschenoper* songs, some of which are now on one of these CDs. Though I do not believe productions should be used as models, I am often tempted to believe that the early rendering of the songs should be. "Alabama Song" is, to my ears, rendered far better by Lenya than by Teresa Stratas, and I have often cited the singing of Trude Hesterberg (not represented in the present set, however) as a kind of model to students and singers. I must relent. In the end, performance models must not be stabilized; they must develop and change with the changing times.

Eric Bentley
New York City



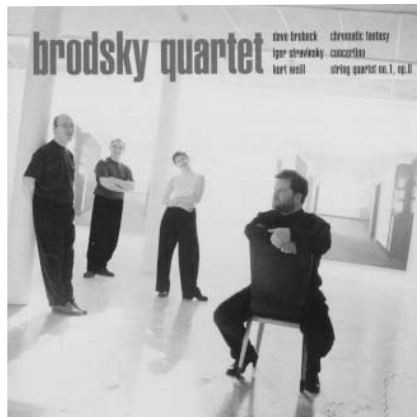
Recordings

String Quartet No. 1, Opus 8

Brodsky Quartet

Silva Classics SILKD 6014

Recording also includes: Dave Brubeck, *Chromatic Fantasy* and Igor Stravinsky, *Concertino*.



Weill's not very extensive chamber music oeuvre belongs to the first phase of his career. The six-year period encompassing it is marked by the search for an independent artistic perspective, but shows the influence of his teachers, above all Ferruccio Busoni. Weill joined Busoni's master class in 1921 after breaking off his instruction at the conservative Berlin Hochschule für Musik and leaving the city for his first job as a conductor in Lüdenscheid.

The catalog of extant chamber music starts with the still unpublished String Quartet in B Minor (1918), begun under the tutelage of Engelbert Humperdinck at the Hochschule. It ends with *Frauentanz* (1924), which may be considered not only one of the best of Weill's early works but also one of the most original documents of the beginning of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* in the music of the Weimar Republic. In between lie the Cello Sonata (1920) and the String Quartet, op. 8 (1922–23), which exhibit a wide range of expressive emphasis, from late Romantic expressionism to a demeanor—both aggressive and playful—of simplicity and dissonant severity. The youthful ferment of the early compositions makes them as problematic to perform as they are fascinating to consider; finding the correctly balanced approach to them is more difficult than it is for the later masterworks. Weill never achieved the same measure of sureness in his instrumental concert music that he did with his mature compositions written for the musical theater, his natural element. (A comparison with the contemporaneous chamber works of Hindemith or even Krenek demonstrates this clearly.)

It is no wonder that the discography of Weill's chamber music has turned out to be correspondingly slender. For many years the only recording of either quartet was by the Sequoia Quartet (Nonesuch 79071). But recently, two releases including the String Quartet, op. 8 have appeared: one by the Brandis Quartet (Nimbus NI 5410) includes quartets from the 1920s by Hindemith and Schulhoff; the other, the present recording, matches Weill's quartet with Stravinsky's popular *Concertino* (1920) and Dave Brubeck's 1996 composition *Chromatic Fantasy*. This compilation of three compositions, spanning three quarters of a century and encompassing the development from Neoclassicism to Postmodernism, is unified by two thematic ideas: the crossover between jazz and classical idioms, and tribute to J.S. Bach, which all three compositions acknowledge through the use of chorales.

It is an open question whether, as Erik Levi suggests in the program booklet, these three distinctively individual works show any real aesthetic correlation that goes beyond compositional technique. Even upon an initial hearing, Brubeck's composition sounds far more eclectic than the other two. What is more, it has a tendency toward epic breadth that Weill and especially Stravinsky had already conquered earlier in the century. Stravinsky's *Concertino* (which the Brodsky Quartet conveys with appropriate precision and lack of pretension) engages in a much wittier and more radical discourse with Bach's counterpoint than does the Brubeck, in spite of the latter's skillfulness and somewhat long-winded dramaturgy. The jazz giant Brubeck, in his effortless spinning

out of four-voice fugues and chaconnes, seems more fixated upon establishing his classical credentials than upon achieving an original musical utterance. Trying to prove a jazz-classical synthesis from this collection of pieces is on shaky ground from the very start.

Stylistically, Weill's quartet lies between Stravinsky and Brubeck. The liquidation of a common formal scheme of separate movements in favor of strongly individual movement characters within an overall formal concept already signals expressive compression and restraint. However, in the "Choralphantasie" finale (newly composed at the wish of Busoni for the first performance in 1923) the piece still falls back upon the romanticizing paths of the big compositional gesture. This indecisiveness is endearing, but the piece stands awkwardly in the middle of the road between ironic distance and a conjuration of Baroque monumentality. In this sense it is utterly indebted to Busoni's concept of the *Junge Klassizität*.

The Brodsky Quartet does not seem comfortable with this difficult early work. Their approach here is less coherent than that demonstrated in their performance of the other two pieces, especially with respect to the mediation of the piece's conflicting expressive levels. A careful calculation of how to emphasize the contrasts in movement character—from which the very idea of the work (or its ideal) emerges—might very well lead to a decision to sharpen those contrasts. But the Brodsky inclines toward a certain neutrality, especially in terms of a noticeable leveling of dynamic contrast. Though the quartet plays on a high musical level and is aided by a technically first-class recording, this performance falls short of a superlative level of intensity and engagement.

Wolfgang Rathert
Hochschule der Künste, Berlin

Recordings

Der neue Orpheus *Concerto for Violin and* *Wind Instruments*

Rheinische Philharmonie

Carole Farley, soprano; Michael Guttman, violin; José Serebrier, conductor

ASV CD DCA 987

(Recording also includes two selections from *Der Silbersee*: “Fennimores Lied” and “Ballade von Cäsars Tod”; and two selections from *Street Scene*: “A Boy Like You” and “Somehow I Never Could Believe.”)

Concerto for Violin and *Wind Instruments*

Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin

Chantal Juillet, violin; John Mauceri, conductor

Decca 452 481-2

(Recording also includes Ernst Krenek’s Violin Concerto No. 1, op. 29 and Erich Wolfgang Korngold’s Violin Concerto in D major, op. 35.)

“Now it has seized me again. I’m buried in this new opera, and I leave the house only to take care of the most necessary everyday matters. I must master a type of expression that is still new to me. To my satisfaction, I can now say that—as I’ve already discovered in *Der neue Orpheus*—I’m gradually forging ahead toward ‘my real self’; my music is becoming much more confident, much freer, lighter—and simpler.”

In this frequently quoted passage from an undated letter to his parents (written in 1925), Kurt Weill identified two pivotal works of his early years. The opera *Royal Palace* was significant as the first successful instance of the synthesis of popular and serious elements that would define Weill’s mature style.

In its immediate predecessor, *Der neue Orpheus*, however, the “simpler” elements are not so much assimilated as they are merely asserted. Two outer sections redolent of Weill’s musical practices of the mid-1920s frame a series of seven variations in the rhythms of popular dances.

Even though these stylistic insertions are both motivated and justified by Iwan Goll’s surreal text, the effect is not wholly convincing. Beyond the use of the dance rhythms, Weill also drew on elements of the cantata, solo concerto, and opera in this transitional work, and the conflation of these disparate genres only compounds the problems posed by Weill’s diverse musical language. It is therefore not surprising that Kim Kowalke, in his book *Kurt Weill in Europe*, judged *Der neue Orpheus* to be “a tentative and somewhat unsuccessful juxtaposition of old and new.”

Whatever its perceived shortcomings, *Der neue Orpheus* demands the attention of anyone interested in the origins of Weill’s later methods. Iwan Goll’s poem reworks the classic legend into a search by an early twentieth-century Orpheus for his prostitute Eurydice. This may be a bit too self-consciously “modern” for late twentieth-century sensibilities, but Weill’s music is never so heavy-handed or world-weary as Goll’s text. If anything, Weill’s music, on a moment-to-moment basis, exhibits an assurance of technique that can be quite engaging on first acquaintance and also wears well with repeated hearings.

It is therefore surprising to learn that a new ASV release is the first-ever commercial recording of Weill’s cantata, and that is reason enough to welcome it. The performance is credible, but not definitive. Carole Farley’s voice is perhaps too operatic at times, and her diction, although generally good, is sometimes lost in her vibrato. Michael Guttman provides strong support with his playing of the demanding passages for solo violin that lead into and help to define the various moods of the seven variations. The playing of the Rheinische Philharmonie under José Serebrier is likewise good without being compelling; only the most critical listeners will find anything about which they can possibly complain. In short, those who must have *Der neue Orpheus* will not be disappointed by the performance, while anyone who passes on this disc need not worry that he or she has missed a hidden gem.

The other major work on this CD, Weill’s Concerto for Violin and Wind Instruments, op. 12, predates *Der neue Orpheus* by less than two years, and the close relationship of these two works is strikingly evident in this release. Even though the Concerto follows the cantata on the CD, there is no sense of regression.

Indeed, an inattentive listener might assume that the Concerto’s opening is merely another section of the cantata, so similar is the idiom of both works. The Concerto, however, remains firmly rooted in the more strident language of art music in the 1920s, and Weill’s solid command of that expressive vocabulary has earned this work a small but growing place in the repertoire since its premiere in 1925.

This ASV recording, which features the same cast of performers (minus Farley) as for *Der neue Orpheus*, is the fourteenth commercial release of Weill’s Concerto and one of eight currently available in the latest *Schwann Opus* catalog. Among its competitors is another new release on the Decca label, which features soloist Chantal Juillet playing violin concertos by Weill, Korngold, and Krenek, accompanied by the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin under John Mauceri. This second CD is part of the series “Entartete Musik: Music Suppressed by the Third Reich.”

Anyone choosing between just these two recordings of Weill’s Concerto will be drawn immediately to the performance by Guttman and Serebrier, for they are easily the more self-assured. Curiously, even though the total time of the Juillet–Mauceri performance is shorter by two minutes, their playing lacks intensity and gives the impression of an overly cautious reading, even at their faster tempos. Juillet’s tone, moreover, is not very big, and she often fails to convey the lyricism of Weill’s solo lines, especially in the first movement. Guttman, in contrast, has a more robust sound, and he plays with a confidence that imbues this concerto with the intensity and jauntiness that it needs. Despite the weaknesses of Juillet’s performance, the Decca release will probably still attract buyers simply because it includes the first ever commercial recording of Krenek’s Concerto.

The ASV release also includes four vocal excerpts: two from *Der Silbersee*, Weill’s last work completed in Germany, and two from his American opera *Street Scene*. As with the cantata, Farley’s voice is too big for my taste in the German excerpts but is better suited to the English. The real reason for buying the ASV disc, however, remains *Der neue Orpheus* and also Guttman’s solid performance of the Concerto for Violin. The Decca CD is strictly for those who want the Krenek Concerto or who are obsessive collectors of Weill’s music.

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